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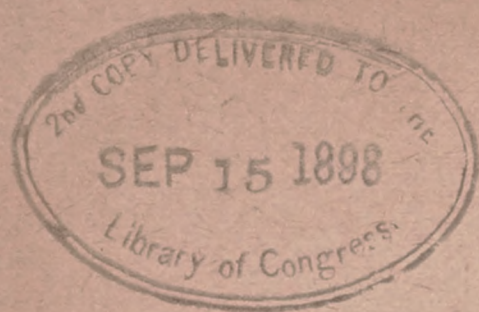
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FATE OF A SOLDIER.



BY THE AUTHOR OF "QUO VADIS."

NEW YORK :
J. S. OGILVIE PUBLISHING COMPANY,
57 ROSE STREET.



The Fate of a Soldier.

BY

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Us Follow Him," Etc.

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THE SUNNYSIDE SERIES. No. 103. October, 1898. Issued Quarterly.
\$1.00 per year. Entered at New York Post-Office as second-class matter.

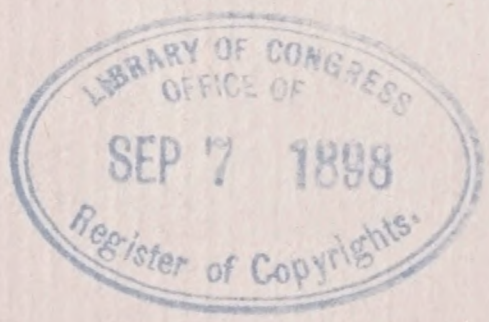
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57 ROSE STREET.

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THE FATE OF A SOLDIER.

CHAPTER I.

The name of my hero was Bartek Slowik, but owing to his habit of opening his eyes wide when addressed by some one the neighbors had nicknamed him "Staring Bartek." On close observation he resembled but faintly the bird implied by his name,—the nightingale, but the narrow extent of his mental faculties coupled with his truly Homeric simplicity had inflicted upon him, by way of indemnification, another appellative, namely, "Foolish Bartek." The latter was the most popular and figures as the only one concerned in this narrative, although Bartek

possessed still another, distinctly official name. As the words *czlowick* and *Slowik* are consonous to German ears, and since the Germans are apt to translate barbaric Slavonic words into their own, civilized tongue, the following scene had taken place before the Board of Conscription :

“What is your name ?” inquired the officer, addressing Bartek.

“*Slowik.*”

“*Schloik ? — Ach, ja. — Well.*”

And the officer entered his name as “*Man.*”

Bartek lived at a small village called Pog-nembin, which name is applied to a great many towns, both in the grand duchy of Poznan and in other provinces of the Old Republic. Besides a small piece of land, a hut and a few cows he still owned a motley horse and Magda, his wife. Thanks to this fortunate coincidence of circumstances, he was able to pass his life peacefully and leis-

urely, in harmony with the sense of the verse :

His wife's name was Magda, and motley was his steed ;
God will forever help His true children in their need.

His life passed according to the will of God, and only when God caused the outbreak of war was Bartek troubled. Words passed to the effect that every one must join the army and leave his house and his fields in the care of the women-folks. The inhabitants of Pognembin were averagely very poor. In winter Bartek had secured work at a factory and earned a little for the support of the household. But what was now to be done ? Who might know when this war with the Frenchmen would come to an end ? When Magda had read the proclamation she said, with an oath: " May all the plagues strike them ! Although you are a fool, I feel sorry for you. Surely, the Frenchmen won't give you up, but knock your head off."

Bartek thought his wife was right. He feared the Frenchmen like pestilence, and, besides, he was sorely troubled. What harm had these Frenchmen done him? Why should he be brought to some terrible, unknown country, where not a single living soul would feel kindly towards him? As long as he had remained in Pognembin things went along fairly well; but after having received his marching order he realized that the old place was really better than anything else under the sun. Still, matters could not be changed; fate had decided his course, and he must go. So Bartek embraced his wife and Franck, their two years old boy, and left his house, spitting as he went, and made the sign of the cross. Magda followed him. Their parting was by no means marked by excessive tenderness. The woman and the boy sobbed; Bartek said again and again: "Well, well. Be quiet, be quiet." At length

they struck the highroad and discovered that the whole population of Pognembin was situated exactly as they were, themselves.

The entire village is on its feet. Large number of conscribed soldiers are on their way to the railroad station, accompanied by their wives and children. Every one is dispirited. Only a party of young fellows who stride along comfortably smoking their pipes, bear an aspect of indifference; some of them are already drunk, and shout and bawl in hoarse tones, as they go.

One of the German colonists of Pognembin begins to sing "*Die Wacht am Rhein*;" he is, withal, in a state of deadly fear. The whole confused, party-colored multitude from which the bayonets of the *gens d'armes* are glittering forth advances amidst cries, noise and shouting towards the one end of the village, following the fences. The sobbing women have thrown their arms around

the shoulders of the soldiers. Some old woman exhibits a yellow tooth and clinches her hand with a threatening grimace. Another is swearing at something, or some one, and shouts: "The Lord will make you suffer for our tears." Exclamations are heard: "Franck, Kaska, Juzek, farewell!" Dogs bark; the bells chime, and the dean himself, is praying for the souls of the doomed men. Many of those who are now on their way to the station will never return, and all realize this. The war will swallow them all up, and the war does not give them back. Ploughs are destined to rust in the fields, for Pognembin has declared war against France. Pognembin could not reconcile herself to the supremacy of Napoleon the Third, and the problem of the Spanish succession had affected her deeply. The chime of the church bells attract the multitude; off go hats and helmets before the crucifix. The air is filled with

golden dust from the road, for the day is warm and dry. At both sides long stretches of ripe corn sways before the breeze, nodding with heavy ears. Far, far up in the blue ether the sky-larks twitter with might and main.

The railroad station. Larger crowds yet. There are also the conscribed soldiers from the neighboring villages, Upper Krzywda, Lower Krzywda, from Wywlaszczynce, Niedola and Mizerow. Uproar, turmoil and confusion! The walls of the waiting rooms are covered with copies of the summons. "For the sake of God and for their country" are the men going to war,—for the purpose of defending their threatened families, their wives and children, their houses and homesteads, and the Frenchmen are especially enraged against Pognembin, Upper Krzywda, Lower Krzywda, Wywlaszczynce, Niedola, and Mizerow. Such is, at least, the impres-

sion produced upon those who read the summons. The whole space of the waiting room becomes fairly clogged by tobacco smoke which veils the placards. It is difficult to make one's self understood in the noise. Persons come and go, shout and scream. German words of command, short, precise and inflexible, are heard from the platform.

The bell sounds.

From far away the snorting locomotive is approaching nearer and nearer. It seems as though war, herself, is advancing.

Another sounding of the bell. Every one shudders. A woman cries out: "There they are, there they are," and a voice rises out of the tumult: "The Frenchmen are coming." For a moment the women as well as the future heroes of Sedan are seized by panic.

In a short while the train has reached the platform. Everywhere are caps and coats trimmed with red. There is a stir not un-

like the crowding in an ant-hill. In the depths of the freight cars bright cannon with long, darksome bodies suggest their presence. A forest of bayonets protrudes from the open cars. Evidently the soldiers have been ordered to sing, for the train is fairly shaking with the echo of sturdy voices. A feeling of power and strength issues from this train, interminable as it seems.

Out on the platform the recruits are being mustered. Those who can say farewell once more hasten to do so. Bartek lifts both his arms and stares — and stares —

“Good-by, Magda.”

“Oh, my poor boy ! ”

“You will never see me again.”

“No, no,—never!”

“It cannot be helped.”

“The Holy Virgin shield you.”

“Good-bye, and take good care of the house.”

The weeping woman has thrown her arms around him. “God keep you.”

The last moment has come. Wailing, sobbing and moaning suppress all other sounds. Farewell, farewell! But the soldiers have already separated from this confused throng. They segregate into a solid mass which contracts itself into squares and parallelograms and moves along with the steadiness and regularity of a machine. A command is heard: "Enter the coaches." The squares and parallelograms are broken in the middle and wend their way in thin chains toward the coaches, where they disappear. Far ahead of it all the hissing locomotive throws out clouds of blue smoke. In another moment it snorts like a dragon and sputters forth streams of hot steam. The moaning of the women reaches its highest pitch. Some bury their faces in their aprons; others stretch out their arms toward the coaches. The sobbing voices repeat the names of husbands and sons.

"Farewell, Bartek!" cries Magda from

below. "Be careful of yourself. The Holy Virgin be with you. Good-bye! Oh, gracious Heaven!"

— "and take good care of the house," shouts Bartek.

Suddenly the train received a jerk. The cars were pulled forward and set in motion.

"Remember your wife and children —!" called Magda, keeping steps with the movement of the train. "Farewell, in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost."

The movement of the train became swifter and swifter, as it carried away the warriors from Pognembin and Upper and Lower Krzywda, from Niedola and Mizerow.

CHAPTER II.

Magda and her weeping townswomen returned to Pognembin while the train, lined with shining bayonets, proceeded on its way into the grey unknown, Bartek among the passengers. Grey in grey, such is the shade of the landscape by which Pognembin is little by little, but surely swallowed. At length the linden trees are fading out, but the church steeple enshrouds itself in a golden haze, as the sun shines upon it. Finally the lindens disappear altogether, and the glowing cross dwindles down into a sparkling point. As long as this point remains in view Bartek watches it; but when it is no more visible his despair is complete. His energies relax, and a feeling of weakness overpowers him.

Then he would stare at the "*Korporal*"

who was now, next to God, his master and authority. What would happen next depended upon the officer's movements. Bartek, himself, knows nothing and comprehends nothing. The officer is seated on a bench, smoking a pipe and holding a musket between his knees. The smoke envelops his earnest face with its vexed expression in a cloud. But this face is watched by others than Bartek; he is observed from all sides of the car, silently, but attentively. At Pogonembin or Krzywda every Bartek or Woitek is master of his own movements; here, the officer is in command. When he thunders forth his "Eyes right," or "Eyes left," every one directs his eyes accordingly. The inquisitive gaze of the privates seems to ask: "What will now happen to us?" He, however, knows no more about the situation than the others, and would be happy to learn something from one of the superior officers. The soldiers are afraid of asking any ques-

tions of him, for war has broken out, with court-martials and other appurtenances. No one knows what is allowed and what is not; at any rate, the soldiers are ignorant thereof, and become frightened at the mere sound of such words as *Kriegsgericht*,—something they do not comprehend, and of which they are so much more afraid. They feel that this officer is at present far more important to them than during the manoeuvres at Poznan. Not only is he aware of what things will happen, but without him no step whatever can be taken.

In the meantime the *Korporal* evidently grew tired of holding his rifle, for he threw it over to Bartek, who seized the weapon, kept his breath, opened his eyes wide and gaped at the man without, however, gaining any consolation.

The oppression was general; even the officer found himself, too, in a state of uneasiness. At the stations where singing and

shouting prevailed he alighted and rushed from one place to another, distributing orders and using a great many invectives for the purpose of showing off before the higher officers, but no sooner is the train put in motion than silence falls upon the men, himself-included. He, too, views the world from two sides: One bright and agreeable,—his wife, his house and his warm bed; the other dark and gloomy,—France and the war. His enthusiasm, as well as that of the army, was ready, at any time, to evaporate.

The panting, snorting train sped across the country towards the far-away distant. At every station fresh coaches and locomotives were added to it; helmets, cannon, horses and bayonets, and the ensigns of Ulan regiments were in evidence at all quarters. The evening was beautiful. The sun set in a glorious red; far up in the sky hung numerous little clouds, daubed in a rosy hue towards the western horizon. The train had

ultimately ceased stopping for recruits and rattled along towards the setting sun as though it were bent upon a plunge into a lake of blood. From the open coach occupied by the privates of Pognembin, including Bartek, the view commanded an array of towns, villages, storks which crouched on one leg in their nests, houses and fruit-gardens. It all remained behind, and it all was daubed in red. The men grew bolder when the officer, reclining upon a sack, fell into slumber with a kaolin pipe in his mouth. Woitek Gwizdala, a farmer from Pognembin, seated himself next to Bartek and jogged him with his elbow.

“Bartek, look here.”

Bartek turned around and fixed his speculative, staring glance upon the man.

“Why do you sit there and gape like a calf which is carried to the shambles?” whispered Gwizdala. “Your poor wretch of a body will go there in time, don’t you doubt it.”

“Oh, no — no —,” groaned Bartek.

“Are you frightened?” inquired Gwizdala.

“Should I not be afraid —?”

The red glow surrounding the setting sun grew deeper and deeper. Gwizdala pointed towards it and whispered: “Do you see that bright tint? Do you know what it is, fool? It is blood. We are yet in Poland — in our own land, you know,—but far, far away, where you see those shining colors lies France.”

“Shall we soon be there?”

“Are you in a hurry, perhaps? Oh, yes, people say it is far, far away. But the Frenchmen will meet us somewhere on the road, depend upon it.”

Bartek's Pognembinal brains were in a state of great activity. After a short pause he resumed:

“Woitek.”

“What?”

“What kind of people are they, these Frenchmen?”

Woitek's wisdom became confronted, at this juncture, with a deep that swallowed him up before he realized how he might save himself. He knew so much: The Frenchmen were, — well, they were Frenchmen, of course, and some old man or woman had told him they were always ready for bloodshed.

Bartek repeated his question.

“What kind of people are the Frenchmen?”

“The deuce knows what they are.”

Woitek knew of three nations: The Poles in the middle; “Moscowits” at one side, Germans at the other. In his effort of being explicit rather than accurate he said :

“What kind of people? Why, how can I best explain it! I suppose they are a kind of Germans, only a great deal worse.”

“Oh, those rascals.”

Until then Bartek had entertained only one feeling towards the Frenchmen, namely, a feeling of inexplicable terror. Now the

Prussian soldier experienced a pronounced patriotic sensation of disgust. As, however, he did not yet fully comprehend the intelligence, he continued :

“But if that is so, the Germans will fight people of their own kind.”

Here Woitek, following the example of Sokrates, resolved upon adopting the method of the likeness, and replied:

“Did your dog never fight mine, perhaps?”

Bartek gazed at him with open mouth.

“Why, that’s true enough.”

“The Austrians are Germans,—anyhow,” pleaded Woitek, “and yet our people has been at war with them, have n’t they? Old Swierszez often spoke of the battles in which he fought, and told how Steinmetz called to his men: “Forward, boys, forward against the Germans!” The trouble is that the Frenchmen will give us harder work.”

“Will they?”

“The Frenchmen never lost a battle. When these fellows catch hold of you, there is a mighty poor chance of escaping from them. Every one of them matches two or three men of our size, and they carry as long beards as any Jew. A great many of them are as black as devils, and when you meet such a fellow you had better say the Lord’s Prayer straightaway.”

“But why do we go against them, then?” asked Bartek in despair.

This philosophical remark may have been less foolish than it appeared to Woitek who, presumably influenced by official inspiration, made haste to reply:

“Well, to say the truth, I’d rather not do it. But then, if we don’t go, they’ll come on their own account. There is nothing to say about that; you’ve read the proclamation. It is true that they are awfully mad at our farmers, and people say they want all our land because they are anxious to smuggle

brandy from our kingdom into their own country. But this the government won't permit, and so the war has broken out. See ?”

“Why should I not understand that ?” said Bartek, somewhat reassured.

Woitek continued :

“They run after our woman-folks like mice after fried bacon.”

“Why, in that case they won't spare even Magda.”

“They don't even spare old women.”

“Oh, no — no,” exclaimed Bartek in a tone indicating that he might continue: “If such is the case, I shall be ready to fight.”

He saw it all clearly now; this condition of affairs was too bad. They might have smuggled some brandy into their country; such affairs did not concern him. But with Magda the case was quite different. Now Bartek commenced viewing the case from the standpoint of his individual interests,

and felt comparatively safe at the idea of such an array of soldier and cannon setting out for the protection of his Magda, threatened, as she was, by French love-making. He involuntarily clinched his hands, and the fear of the Frenchmen filled his heart with hatred. True, there was nothing else to do but fight them. The glare in the sky had in the meantime faded out, and twilight set in. In a little while night is coming on; the coach rolls heavily along the uneven rails. To the right and left are helmets and bayonets nodding and swaying in time to the movements of the train.

An hour passed, and another. From the engine thousands of glowing sparks, golden-red bands and fiery worms are spurted forth through the dark. Like sparks in the air did Bartek's thoughts of the war, of Pogonembin, of the Frenchmen and Germans circle about his head. It seemed as though he were unable to move from his seat on the

bench. At length he fell asleep,— a sickly slumber haunted by dreams and visions. At first he thought his own dog and that of Woitek were fighting. He reaches for his stick and bids them separate, when another vision reveals itself. Magda has seated herself side by side by a Frenchman who is as black as coal. Other Frenchmen are making game of Bartek, point at him, open their mouths and grin. The sound of the rattling engine strikes his ears; Bartek seems to hear the Frenchmen's cries: Magda! Magda! Magda!— Magda! He roars out: "Be quiet, you infamous rascals, you!" But they are persistent and continue: "Magda! Magda!" Dogs bark, and the whole village of Pog-nembin calls to him: "Keep hold of the women!" Then they gag him; but he bounds to his feet, lays about himself, breaks the cords and seizes his Frenchman by the neck. Then, suddenly ———

Suddenly a sensation of violent pain seizes

him,—pain suggestive of a hard blow. Bartek wakes and jumps to his feet. Every one else is awakened and inquires what has happened. It is this confounded Bartek who has, in his sleep, grasped the beard of the *Korporal*. Now he stands there, straight as a rush, two fingers touching his cap, while the officer is rushing to and from roaring in furor :

“Slavonic idiot, as you are! I’ll be blamed if I don’t strike your old head until the teeth shall dance out of your mouth by sections.”

Almost hoarse with fury the officer continues abusing Bartek who remains immovable, with two fingers touching the cap. The other privates bite their lips to avoid smiling, still the last words from the officer does not fail to impress them with fear.—“Slavonic beast; beast from Podolia!”—At length quiet reigned once more, and Bartek took his seat. His cheeks burned, and the

locomotive continued its mocking "Magda, Magda, Magda."

His heart was heavy,—so heavy.

CHAPTER III.

A pale, straggling light illuminates the physiognomies of the soldiers who had fallen asleep tired with the hardships of the day. Some rest with their heads bent downward, others face the dawn that rises in the east and sheds its rosy red glory upon the world. The air is fresh and clear when the men awake. Through the brilliant morning haze an unknown landscape is unveiled before them. They are surprised: Where — where is Pognembin? The appearance of the landscape is strangely changed. Woody heights enclose them from all sides, and tiled houses with black window-posts and white walls — houses as fine as small castles and overgrown with vines — peep forth from the valleys. Here churches with tall, pointed steeples, their factory-chimneys with plum-

ages of reddish clouds of smoke! But the view is narrow, the wide plains and the corn-fields are wanting. Instead, the population seems crowded together in small spaces, in towns and villages. Without stopping the train is rushing past a great number of small stations. Little by little the sun ascends from behind the mountains; in the coach one of the boys begins to say aloud his morning prayers. Others follow his example, and the first rays of the sun meet a line of devout, earnest young faces.

When at length the train stops it is surrounded by large crowds of eager patriots. There are news from the battle-fields: Victory, victory! The telegraph has clicked the news from one end of the country to the other. All had been expecting defeat; now they have been awakened by good news, and their joy is complete. The population of the little town half dressed and exultant, leaves houses and beds and hastens to the

station. Flags are fluttering from roofs and gables, and the patriots wave their handkerchiefs. *Bier*, tobacco and cigars are brought down to the coaches. Enthusiasm runs high. Out over a sea of glowing, glad faces rushes like a tempest the solemn strain of *Die Wacht am Rhein*. Some burst into tears, others throw their arms around each other. "Our Fritz" has routed the enemy, cannon and banners are taken. Full of noble enthusiasm are the burghers distributing among the soldiers all they possess, and the men express their gratitude by singing. The coaches ring with the powerful voices while the multitude is listening, quiet and spell-bound,—for the words are unintelligible :

Our Bartosz, our Bartosz,
our courage is wakened,
from sorrow and danger
God will us deliver.

Folanders, Polanders ! — repeats the multitude as it surrounds the coaches and ad-

mires the physique of the men. The common feeling of safety and courage is strengthened by tales of the irresistible bravery of those Slavonic regiments.

Bartek's swollen cheeks, his yellow moustache, his staring eyes and powerful frame make him appear quite formidable. What a defender of the Germans ! Such a man is bound to make havoc among the Frenchmen? Bartek smiles contentedly; he, too, is pleased with the idea of the Frenchmen having lost the battle. They cannot now reach Pognembin, deprive him of his land and run away with Magda. He smiles, but as his face is extremely sore, a grimace is the result of his efforts. Truly, he looks terrifying. By way of retaliation his appetite equals, however, that of a Homeric hero. Sausage in vast amounts and large cans of beer disappear in the bottomless gorge of his mouth. Somebody gives him cigars and money, and he accepts it all.

He turns to Woitek. "These Germans are very kind," says he. "There you see, they have routed the Frenchmen."

But the sceptical Woitek cannot help throwing a shadow into his joy. He prophesies, in the manner of Cassandra: "The Frenchmen will always allow themselves to be beaten, in order to fool their enemies. But afterwards they will fight at a furious rate."

Woitek is not aware of the fact that whole Europe shares his opinion, nor does he think that whole Europe, himself included, is entirely mistaken.

They resume their journey. As far as the view extends have the houses been decorated with flags. The train stops at every station, where it is detained by long lines of coaches. All provinces in the country contribute soldiers who hasten to join their victorious comrades. The coaches are decorated with green garlands. Ulans place their boquets

on the lance-heads; the majority of the Ulan regiments consists of Polanders. Once in a while the men will talk to one another :

“How are you, comrades? I wonder where it pleases the Lord to bring us?”

As downcast as the men were after their departure from Pognembin, as happy and enthusiastic are they now. But the first train that arrives with dead and wounded soldiers annihilates this sentiment. It met them at Deutz, where it stops, allowing those who are hastening to the battle fields, to pass. But the crossing of the bridge at Cologne takes several hours, and in the meantime Bartek, along with other soldiers, alights to take a view of the wounded comrades. Some of the latter are resting in closed coaches, others have been huddled together in open cars, for want of space. Bartek stares at them, his courage is beginning to evaporate.

“Woitek, look here,” cries he, greatly

agitated; "look how the Frenchmen have mutilated them."

Surely, there was something worthy of attention. Pale, tortured faces, blackened by smoke and soiled with blood. Only by a deep groaning do they greet the general exclamations of joy. Some are cursing the war between the Frenchmen and the Germans. Their dried up, soiled mouths open every little while to cry for water. Eyes are staring around, sorrowful and bewildered. Here and there is some one already marked by death,—a face either quiet, with blue streaks around the eyes, or distorted by cramps, with a vacant stare and white teeth visible between the parted lips. Bartek sees the bloody fruits of warfare the very first time. In a half-dazed state he stands among the others. Every one pushes him, and one of the *gens d'armes* strikes him with the butt-end in the back of his head. His eyes are seeking Woitek, whom he finds and to whom he says:

“Gracious heaven, Woitek, what a life.”

“Only wait until your turn comes.”

“Jesus Maria. This is sheer murder. No, no! When two peasants get into a scuffle they are brought before the court, and punished. Yes, they receive a punishment, but —— ———.”

“Well, yes. But here no one is counted of any value, you see, unless he kills a great many of his enemies. Why, are you so foolish to think that we are going to shoot at a target, or fire blank, as we did at the manoeuvres? Don’t you know we shall level our rifles at live men?”

He was evidently quite familiar with the difference between theory and practice. Bartek, himself, had taken part in manoeuvres and reviews; he was aware that in war it is all-important to *kill*; but the sight of the wounded soldiers and the misery of the victims made him feel so ill that he was almost ready to give it all up. His fear of the

Frenchmen returned more strongly than ever, and was not alleviated until the train had passed Deutz and halted at Cologne. He happened to see some prisoners in the Central Railroad Station. They had been surrounded by a crowd of guards and citizens who viewed them somewhat haughtily, but without malice. Bartek broke through the crowd, elbowed himself to the front and glanced into the coach, surprised and startled.

A number of French infantry soldiers with faded mantles had been huddled together in a coach. The small, dirty and neglected figures were stowed together like herrings, crowding the narrow space almost to suffocation. Some stretched out their hands and accepted whatever the guards permitted them to receive from the spectators. Bartek's idea of Frenchmen was, thanks to Woitek's explanations, decidedly incongruous to the spectacle before him. His courage and en-

thusiasm returned, and he glanced around to see if Woitek might be somewhere in the neighborhood. Woitek was standing next to him.

“What did you mean by telling me such stories of the Frenchmen!” asked Bartek. “Why, they look wretchedly. I’d undertake to seize such a fellow and use him as a club against the others.”

“I suppose they are tired,” ventures Woitek who cannot, himself, hide his disappointment.

“What language do the speak?”

“Why,—well, it isn’t Slavonic.”

Bartek, feeling quite reassured, follows the line of the cars.

“Miserable wretches—,” says he, as a result of his mustering.

Some of the next coaches are serving, however, as provisional prisons for zouaves. As the latter were placed in closed coaches their size and stature could not be closely

observed. Still, the windows permitted a view of the old soldiers with their long beards, their warlike, earnest-looking faces and their threatening, flashing eyes.

“These are worse,” said Bartek to himself eying the man suspiciously, and somewhat apprehensive of their being within hearing distance.

“But you have never seen those who have not been taken prisoners,” observed Woitek.

“Gracious —.”

“Some time you will see them, though.”

Turning from the zouaves they proceeded to inspect the next coach. Bartek bent forward — and recoiled several steps.

“Woitek, — help — — — Woitek.”

Through the open window they saw the dark features of a Turco. His face was almost black, and he had evidently been wounded, — at least this was indicated by his distorted features and rolling eyes.

“What is it?” inquired Woitek.

“It is the Evil One, it is no soldier. Oh, God have mercy upon me.”

“Look,” suggested Woitek, “look there. Do you see his teeth?”

“The deuce take him; I don’t want to look.”

After a short pause Bartek said anew:

“Woitek.”

“What?”

“If you were to make the sign of the cross over such a fellow, wouldn’t that help?”

“Heathens don’t understand our sacred faith.”

There was issued an order to enter the cars, and few minutes hence the train proceeded on its way. When it became dark the rolling eyes of the wounded Turcos haunted Bartek’s memory. From the effects of these visions one was hardly able to divine what glorious deeds would be carried out by the Pognembin warrior.

CHAPTER IV.

At the beginning of his participation of the decisive battle of Gravelotte Bartek was strongly tempted to believe that during the battle it is the duty of a soldier to remain perfectly idle. The reason was that his regiment received orders to take up its position on the slope of a hill covered with grape vines. There was cannon-roaring far away, and cavalry rushed from one place to another, until the soil quivered beneath the hoofs of the horses. The Ulan banner and the swords of the cuirassiers flashed in the sunshine. Bomb shells soared through the air above the hill, leaving small, white clouds behind them. The air was filled with smoke which effaced the horizon. It looked as though the battle was, like a tempest, rushing to and fro. But this lasted only a

short while. Then a singular stir announced itself about Bartek's division. Other regiments were placed around the one already facing the hill, and in the spaces between them batteries drove up at a furious rate. They were hauled around as rapidly as possible, with its front toward the hill, and the whole valley behind them was rapidly filled with soldiers. Words of command are passed everywhere, while adjutants hasten from one place to another. The soldiers whisper to one another: "Soon it will be our turn." "Yes, quite likely," replies somebody. Now the uncertain, perhaps even death, is approaching. In the smoke that covers the hill something seeths and bubbles terribly. Boom of cannon and rattling of rifle shooting are approaching. Far away there is a continuous crash of Gatling guns, which produce a perfect rain of bullets over the region commanded by them. Suddenly the neighboring batteries begin their play, roar-

ing forth until earth and sky are trembling with the echo. A hissing is heard in front of Bartek's regiment, and the soldiers gaze eagerly towards it. Something soars through the air toward the ranks,—something not unlike a bright rose, or a cloud, but within this cloud there is a whizzing grinning, buzzing and howling noise. The men cry out: "A shell!" Like a tempest the war-bird approaches, descends and explodes. The men's ears almost seem to burst with the crash,—a crash suggesting a collapse of the earth's crust, or the rush of a cyclone. Disturbance reigns in the lines next to the batteries, but the cries are deafened by a prompt command: "Close the ranks!" Bartek is standing in the front line, clutching his rifle, his nose pointing straight ahead, his beard covered by the stock in order to prevent the clattering of the teeth. Moving as well as shooting are forbidden; one must stand still and wait. Then, another shell descends,

and another, and still another; the wind sweeps away the smoke from the top of the hill. The Frenchmen have already dislodged the Prussian batteries from their position, and placed their own guns instead; presently they emit fire and death over the valley. Every now and then long white bands of smoke shoot forth from the dense brush of vines. French infantry protected by the guns descends the hill and commence musketry. The men have already reached the middle of the slope; they are plainly visible, as the wind drives away the smoke. Do poppies grow along that slope? No, it is the red caps of the infantry. Suddenly they disappear beneath the foliage of the vines,—disappear so completely that only here and there a tricolor is noticeable. The musketry comes rapidly, violently and irregularly, breaking out at different points simultaneously. Above the firing of the rifles the roar of bomb shells

comes rolling incessantly, and the roaring projectiles pass one another high up in the air. A cry is heard from the hill, and the Germans greet it with their *Hurra*. The batteries down on the plain are thundering incessantly with continuous firing; but the Slavonic regiment remains immovable.

Yet the firing draws nearer and nearer. Far away the bullets keep buzzing like flies or bumble-bees, near by they are hissing and whistling, and their number seems to increase constantly, for very soon they begin to graze foreheads, noses, ears and arms, and arrive by thousands, even by millions. It seems remarkable that any one can remain on his feet after such volleys. Suddenly a cry is raised behind Bartek: "Oh, Jesus!"—followed by a sharp: "Close — ranks!"—again death-cries, followed by the officers' prompt command. The ranks are closing narrowly upon one another; bullets are whistling around them in numbers steadily

increasing. The dead and wounded are pulled forth by the legs.

“Are you scared?” inquires Woitek.

“Isn’t this enough to scare one?” returns Bartek, with clattering teeth.

In spite of their fright Bartek and Woitek remain in their places; it never occurs to them that they might cut away and run for their lives. They have been ordered to stand still, so they do, and that is all. Bartek lies. Discipline commands his fantasy, and the latter does not present his position in the most terrible light. Still, he thinks there are chances of his being killed. He communicates this idea to Woitek.

“It doesn’t matter much if such a fool is killed,” returns Woitek indignantly.

The shooting continues; whole lines fall before his eyes. Nobody thinks of bringing away the dead and wounded. The movements of the tricolor among the foliage indicate that the infantry is steadily approach-

ing. There is a perfect rain of grape-shots, resulting in the fall of large numbers of men. The remaining ones are becoming desperate, and little by little a murmur of impatience, even of fury, passes along the lines. One of the men tears off his cap and flings it upon the ground exclaiming in a tone of suppressed misery: "A man dies but once; for Heaven's sake, let it be done!"

Hearing these words Bartek suddenly feels greatly relieved; his fear leaves him almost at once. If one is doomed to die, why, let it be done! It is — it cannot be of great consequence when death comes. This is a specimen of peasant's philosophy, still it is better than a good many other systems, and evokes, at least, a feeling of confidence and repose. Bartek knew that sometime he should die, of course, but inasmuch as the battle threatened to result in a defeat on his side, it was convenient to him to feel quite certain, and he did.

One whole regiment was almost blotted out of existence without firing a single shot. Large crowds of other regiments that have been routed and scattered are rushing past; only the men from Pognembin, Upper and Lower Krzywda and Mizerow remain in line, thanks to the Prussian discipline. But the lines are no more as firm as before; the men are becoming more and more desperate. Some one is murmuring: "We have merely been drawn to the shambles."

"Keep still, Slavonic beast," cries one of the officers.

"None of us will escape alive."

"Don't shield yourself behind my back," exclaims somebody.

"Shut —— !"

Suddenly a voice falls in: "Sacred virgin, to your care —— !"

Bartek joins in: "We command ourselves."

In a little while a choir of Slavonic voices

on this battle-field is appealing to the sacred virgin of Czenstochowa for help and courage. The weak and wounded accompany the hymn with their exclamations: "Oh, Maria, Maria!" She evidently decides to grant their request, for a moment later an adjutant is galloping towards them, and upon his arrival the command is given: "Charge! Hoorah, forward!" The lines of bayonets are immediately lowered; the ranks expand into one long line that moves rapidly towards the slope — towards the enemy which is to be sought with bayonets, as he had not yet become visible. The distance of about two hundred yards is traversed amidst a murderous fire. Are they not killed to the last man, or will they not retreat? Yes, they may die, but retire they never will, for Prussian discipline knows very well how to stir these Slavonic soldiers to frenzy. Amidst the thundering of cannon, the rattling of musketry, — amidst smoke, disturbance and moaning

a hymn is played, deafening the noise of trumpets and drums,—a solemn strain ascending towards the sky and which echoes within every heart in the regiment:

Noch ist Polen nicht verloren.

The soldiers become enthusiastic. With burning cheeks they rush forward over dead and dying, over horses and broken cannon. They fall, but amidst hopeful cries and song. Soon they have reached the upper slope, where vines are hiding them from view. But their cries continue, and bayonets are seen flashing in the air. From the top of the hill the shooting goes on constantly, while down below trumpet after trumpet is sounded. The French volleys are pouring forth with increasing rapidity and vehemence; and suddenly — —.

Suddenly they cease.

Down in the valley Old Steinmetz lights his pipe and says: “Let those fellows have

some music. Now they are having the best of it."

Shortly afterwards one of the fluttering tricolors is lifted up, brandished in the air, and thereupon disappears.

"They are not to be trifled with," exclaims Steinmetz.

The trumpets repeat the hymn, when the second Poznan regiment hastens to the relief of the Pognembin men.

Within the dense shrubbery on the hill a terrible bayonet fight takes place.

But how can I worthily sing the praise of Bartek, my hero, and hand down to posterity a true account of his bravery? In Bartek's case, fear, impatience and desperation had united into a feeling of supreme rage. No sooner was the music heard than his very nerves became strained like bands of steel. He forgot the world about him,—he forgot that he could die but once, and hastened onward blindly following his comrades. Arriv-

ing at the slope he stumbled and fell again and again, struck his nose against the ground, but arose, soiled with mud and bespattered with blood, and pressed forward in breathless haste. He peered through the brush, eager to discover some Frenchman on whom he might cool his frenzy. Truly, there were three men guarding the standard. Bartek made for them; at this moment he was ready to attack even Lucifer.

The men were Turcos. They met his attack promptly and actively. Two bayonets are touching his breast, but he grasps the butt of his rifle and knocks down. There is a terrible yell, a moaning, and two dark bodies stagger and fall, quivering and trembling, to the ground.

A moment later Bartek is confronted with a dozen of men who rush forward to the assistance of the standard-bearer. He loses no time in counting their number, but plunges forward, while they fire at him; — a flash, a

roar, and from the cloud of smoke enveloping him Bartek shouts hoarsely: "Your lead is wasted."

His rifle again describes a curve in the air, and again the result is death and destruction. The Turcos recede at the sight of this mad-looking giant, and whether Bartek's imagination is playing a trick on him, or the Turcos are really saying something in Arabian, certain it is that to Bartek their thick lips appear to frame the words: Magda, Magda!

"Oh, you are the fellows who want Magda," yelled Bartek, striding forward to meet them. Fortunately, at this moment his comrades come to his assistance. Among the dense vines a desperate fight, man to man, ensued. Bartek raged like a tempest. He, blackened by smoke, soiled with blood, more like an animal than a human being, felled one man by every stroke, broke the guns and crushed every hostile skull within

reach. His hands worked with the fatal swiftness and promptitude of a machine, dealing death in every direction. Reaching the standard-bearer he seized him by the throat with his sinewy fingers. The soldier's eyes started out of their hollows, his face swelled, and his hands were loosened from the staff. He fell.

"Hoorah!" cried Bartek, lifting the standard and brandishing it above his head.

This movement of the tricolor was watched by Steinmetz down below. It remained in view but a second, however, as Bartek brought it down upon a head that carried a gold-laced cap.

In the meantime, his comrades had advanced to the top of the hill, so Bartek remained alone for a brief moment. He tore the banner from the staff, folded it together and thrust it under his coat. Then, seizing the staff he started for the top of the hill, where a battery had remained inactive for

some time. It was defended, however, by a number of howling Turcos, supported by a division of zouaves. The latter immediately opened a violent fire against the Slavonians.

“Hoorah!” roared Bartek who, with his comrades, had reached the battery and at once became engaged in a hand-to-hand fight with the French soldiers. Just then the second Poznan regiment arrived to the assistance of the first one. Now the staff of the standard became converted, in Bartek’s hands, into a fearful flail. Every stroke produced a breach in the Frenchmen’s tight ranks, and both the zouaves and the Turcos were seized by panic. Wherever Bartek fought they fled. In another moment Bartek found himself the first time in his life riding a cannon, which he did as ably as if he was mounted on his own aged mare at Pognembin.

Before any one had realized what happened, Bartek was sitting on another can-

non, and yet he had managed to fell another standard-bearer and to seize the banner.

“Long live Bartek!” shouted the soldiers.

The victory was complete. All the Gatling guns were taken, and the retreating infantry, which was met, on the opposite slope of the hill, by a fresh Prussian regiment, had surrendered.

During the pursuit Bartek had taken yet another standard.

He was worth stopping to look at when, joining his comrades, he marched down the hill, carrying on one shoulder two standards. What did he care about the Frenchmen? Woitek was walking at his side, covered with bruises and slashes.

“What did you mean by telling me such stories?” said Bartek. “Why, the Frenchmen are mere vermin; there is no marrow whatever in their bones. They’ve scratched both of us a little, that is all.”

“But who would ever think you’d fight

like a madman," returned Woitek who had witnessed Bartek's exploits — and began viewing him in quite another light than before.

And who had not witnessed Bartek's bravery ? All the privates and most of the officers of his regiment — all regarded the big fellow's gigantic frame, his long, yellow moustache and his round, staring eyes, with a feeling of awe. — — — "Oh, you confounded Polander," said the Major, — a remark that produced a broad grin in the soldier's massive features.

When the regiment halted at the bottom of the hill Bartek enjoyed the honor of being pointed out to the colonel and, by the latter, even to Steinmetz, himself.

Steinmetz looked at the standards, ordered some one to bring them aside, and turned towards Bartek. The latter stands as straight as a rush, presenting arms, while the old general looks at him and nods approval.

Finally he addresses the colonel. The word "officer" is distinguished quite plainly.

"A simpleton, your excellency," suggests the major.

"We shall see ——," says his excellency, turns his horse around and rides up to Bartek.

Bartek is ignorant of all that happens,— ignorant of the fact that something unheard of is in progress: A Prussian general is addressing one of the privates.

But the general's task is greatly facilitated because of his intimacy with the Slavonic language. Besides, this soldier has taken three standards and a whole battery from the enemy.

"Your home?" inquires the general.

"Pognembin," says Bartek.

"Your name?"

"Bartek Slowik."

"*Mensch*," suggests the major.

"Do you know why you fight the Frenchmen?"

“I do, your cellency.”

“Tell me.”

Bartek begins to stammer: “Because — because —.” Suddenly Woitek’s words are called to his mind, and he blabs out, as rapidly as possibly, in order not to swallow his words before they are spoken:

“Because they, too, are Germans, only much greater rascals than the real ones.”

The countenance of the old general undergoes a change suggestive of hearty amusement; he appears ready to burst into laughing, but controls his feelings and turns to the major, saying: “You are right.”

Bartek is yet standing there, composed and self-satisfied.

“Who won this battle?” inquires the general.

“I did, you cellency,” replies Bartek without hesitation.

“Indeed you did. That is quite true, and here is your reward.”

The old general removes the Iron Cross from his breast, leans down and fastens it to Bartek's coat. His good-humoured condescension is reflected in the appearance of the major and the remaining officers. When the general has left the scene Bartek receives ten *Thaler* of the colonel; the major adds five to the ten, and everybody smiles upon him asserting that he has won the battle. No wonder that Bartek feels considerably elated.

Only Woitek is dissatisfied with him. In the course of the evening, when they were sitting together near the camp-fire, Bartek's cheeks being considerably distended with liberal portions of *Wurst*, Woitek dropped the following remark:

"Bartek, y're a fool,— a most confounded fool."

"Why so?" inquired Bartek, comfortably chewing his sausage-feed.

"Sakes! How could you talk to the gen-

eral about the Frenchmen in that manner ? ”

“ But you told me the very same thing. ”

“ Maybe I did. Still, you ought to remember that every officer in our army is a German. ”

“ What has that to do with my answer to the general ? ”

Woitek’s voice became slightly unsteady. “ I’ll tell you ——, ” said he. “ Even if they are Germans, we have no right to tell them in such an abominable manner, and ——. ”

“ But you speak of the Frenchmen, ” interposed Bartek, “ didn’t you ? Well, so did I. ”

“ That’s true enough, but —— ——. ”

Bartek again interrupted him however, and began explaining about offending people, and Germans especially. But Woitek was a poor listener, and Bartek finally relapsed into silence.

CHAPTER V.

Some time afterwards the Royal Prussian mail conveyed the following letter to Pog-nembin :

“Glory to Jesus Christ and His sacred Mother! My beloved Magda : How goes it with you? You are resting snugly in your warm bed, while I am obliged to fight in this horrible war. We have spent some time near Metz, a great fortress, and had a fearful battle, where I thrashed the Frenchmen until both our infantry and our artillery wondered at me. The general once spoke to me and said I had won the battle, and he gave me a cross. All the officers respect me, they hardly ever slap my face. Well, then we marched on, and fought another battle, but I forget the name of the city. There, too, did I thrash the Frenchmen. I took one of their standards and lifted a fine cuirassier colonel off his saddle, and made him prisoner.

When our regiments are dismissed, I am to write a reclamation and remain in service, for even if we don't sleep as much as we should like to do, there is enough of eating, and wine is most plentiful everywhere, as the population possesses much wealth. Whenever we burn a town, or a village, every inhabitant is killed. We spare nobody, not even children or women, nor do I. We have set fire to a church, too, but it matters little, as the people is all catholics. Some of them were roasted, I think, on that occasion. Now we want to fight the emperor, himself, then the war will cease. Take good care of the house as well as of Frank; if you don't I shall knock your head off and show you what kind of a man I am. May the Lord protect you!

“BARTEK SLOWIK.”

Bartek had evidently been taken with the war and began to look at it as a profession. With a strong self-reliance he plunged into battles as though the work required of him was merely consisting in the old, well-known

farm-work to which he was long accustomed. After each battle his breast was covered anew with stars and medals, and although he never reached an officer's rank every one regarded him the foremost private of his regiment. He obeyed promptly, as before, and displayed fully the blind courage of a man who does not heed the danger. This courage was acquired during his first feelings of rage and suspense, but later he became rooted in the practice and the self-reliance of the active soldiers. Besides, his gigantic frame could easily endure all kinds of exertion, marches and fatigue. Many of his comrades succumbed; he, himself, was constantly growing wilder and developed into a beautiful specimen of a cruel Prussian soldier. He no longer satisfied himself by "thrashing" the Frenchmen; he hated them. In addition to this, many of his other views were altered: He became a soldier patriot who blindly adored his superiors.

His second letter to Magda contained the following:

“Woitek was torn to pieces, but this, you see, is war. Besides, he was a great liar, who called the Frenchmen Germans, while the fact is that they are Frenchmen, and nothing else, while we are the only Germans.”

Replying to both these letters Magda scolded him as best she knew :

“DARLING BARTEK :— You, whom the minister has united with me before God’s altar! May the Lord punish you as you deserve! You behave like a heathen dog by uniting with a set of rascals and murdering the Catholics. You don’t know that the rascals are Lutheran’s,— and you, a Catholic, side with them! No doubt you like war, you vagabond, because it is your best pastime to drink and fight and work injury against others. You do not think of fasting, as long as you are free to set fire to the churches. May hell swallow you up, since you are even boasting of such bad deeds,

and because you don't pity even women and children. Fool that you are! Remember what has been written in golden letters for the benefit of our Polish people, that from the beginning of the world until the last day God will have no patience with such rascality, and beware, Turk, that you are, unless you want me to crush your skull. I enclose herewith five *Thaler*, although many difficulties surround me, and it is difficult to manage the household. I embrace you, dearest Bartek.

“YOUR MAGDA.”

The moral of this epistle produced but a slight impression upon Bartek. “The old woman knows nothing about the service, and yet she undertakes to meddle with everything,” said he to himself. So he continued in his old ways, distinguished himself in almost every engagement, and attracting the attention of men even greater than Steinmetz. When, ultimately, the scattered Poznan regiments returned to Germany, he wrote a petition, according to the advice of

the officers, and remained behind. Consequently, he followed the army on its march against the French capital.

His letters were crowded with expressions illustrating his contempt of the Frenchmen. "In every battle they run away like rabbits." But the seige was not calculated to meet with his approval. At Paris he was obliged to remain for many days in the trenches, listening to the cannonade. Often he was required to assist in the throwing up of redoubts and permit the rain to soak his clothes through and through. Besides, he was longing back to his old regiment. The men among whom he now found himself, were almost exclusively Germans, and although he had learned a little of their language at the Pognembin factory, his position was difficult. As time passed he acquired a fairly good use of the German tongue, and yet such an appellative as "Slavonic beast" was often applied to him. His medals as

well as his terrible arms protected him somewhat against too much molestation. After some battles, he won, however, the unqualified admiration of his new comrades, and soon every one looked at him with a true brotherly feeling, as he covered the regiment with honor. Bartek always was offended when some one supposed him to be a "nie-miec" (a German), but in his opposition to the Frenchmen he viewed himself a citizen of Germany.

Something happened, however, that might have given him a great deal of trouble, if his faculty of thinking had not been somewhat obscured. On a certain occasion a couple of companies, of his regiment, were called out against some of the French franc-tireurs, and the latter permitted themselves to be trapped. On this occasion Bartek did not have occasion to pursue a number of retreating red-caps, as the French division was composed of old soldiers, a remainder, probably, of

some regiment belonging to the Foreign Legion. They defended themselves, though completely surrounded, with the utmost bravery, and finally attempted to break through the wall of Prussian arms that surrounded them on all sides. The result of their desperate efforts was that a small troop escaped. The remainder scorned the idea of surrendering, as they knew what was in store for prisoners of their kind. Bartek's division succeeded in capturing only two of them, who were locked up in a wood keeper's house over night to await execution by shooting on the following morning. Several soldiers were placed on guard outside the door, while Bartek became stationed in the room with orders to keep a strict watch over the prisoners, who had been securely pinioned.

One of the Frenchmen was an elderly man with a grey moustache. The expression of his face was indicative of complete indifference. The other bore the appearance of a

young man in the twenties, his beardless face and fresh lips were far from giving him a soldierly aspect, but lent rather a girlish air to his countenance.

“That is the end of it,” said the younger one after a lengthy pause. “A bullet through the brains, and one disappears from the scene.”

Bartek started; his rifle clinched in his hands, for the young man spoke the Polish language.

“It is all the same to me,” replied the elder one in a sullen tone. “God knows I don’t care. I have been tired of it all long ago.”

Bartek’s heart was beating fast under the Prussian uniform.

“Look here,” continued the elder man. “Nothing can be done,—nothing. If you are afraid, you had better think of something else, or lie down and sleep. This is a miserable life. So help me God. I don’t—I don’t care.”

“I feel sorry for my mother ——,” replied his comrade, in an undertone.

To hide his emotion, or for the purpose of deceiving himself he began whistling. Suddenly he stopped, however, and cried in despair :

“Oh, heavens! I have not even said her good-bye.”

“Did you run away from home?”

“I did. My idea was this : No doubt they will conquer the Germans; that may be of some benefit to those at Poznan.”

“That, too, was my idea, but now ——.”

The old man waved his hand and added some words that were drowned in the howling of the wind outside.

The night was cool, and through the dark, moist air came the rain drizzling down in torrents. The room was as dusky as a shroud; the howling of the wind through the old fire-place and the broken windows added to the discomfort and gloom of the place. A

lamp had been put up on a shelf above the window, safe against wind and wet. Bartek had seated himself in a dark corner of the room, where his countenance was not visible.

Probably it was best for the prisoners not to see his face, as he was subject of the most conflicting emotions. At first he became highly astonished and stared at the men, straining his hearing to catch their words. They had entered the French army for the purpose of assisting the Polish cause, while he, himself, was "thrashing" the Frenchmen for Poland's sake. At the dawn of day these two men would be shot, and why? What was he, poor fellow, to think of such a state of affairs?

Could he speak to them and tell them he was one of their kind, and that he pitied them with all his heart? Something arose within him. What could he say to them unless he stepped in and helped them to escape? If he did, he, too, would be shot

without mercy. A strange feeling of pity welled forth from his heart, arose in his throat and threatened to choke the big soldier who boasted of pitying neither women nor helpless children.

The room was quiet, and yet Bartek heard a voice crying aloud amidst the rustling of the tall fir trees outside in the dark : “ Bartek, save your brethren.” The voice became more and more urgent; the wind sweeps through the broken windows into the dimly lighted room, carrying with it the old, well-known sound of creaking branches and rustling foliage — there were such large firs in Pognembin, too,— but above it all the voice cries out: “ Bartek, save your brethren.”

But what can he do ?

Can he join them on their escape through the woods ? Yes, what else !

His very nature,— all that Prussian discipline had inoculated into his primitive self,— recoils from this suggestion. No, no ! Before

such a thought a soldier must cross himself in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost. Would he, a soldier,—would he undertake deserting in the company of prisoners? Never.

The howling of the wind becomes more and more pitiful, and the rustling deep in the forest grows deeper and stronger.

Suddenly the elder prisoner exclaims : “The same wind is blowing by us — in the fall ——.”

“Leave me alone,” interrupts his companion, in a choking voice. After a short pause he adds : “By us,—at home. Oh, Jesus, our Lord.”

Silence again prevails in the room.

Bartek feels chilled. He does not realize what feelings are struggling within him. Although he had never stolen anything from any one, an inner voice attacked him, and he felt as uneasy as a thief who is afraid of being pursued. No danger is threatening

him, and yet he is terribly frightened. His rifle seems to grow heavier and heavier, while the choking sensation threatened to develop into a paroxysm of weeping, but such tears would be shed for the sake of neither his beloved Magda nor his dear Pog-nembin, but the young prisoner.

From time to time he appears to doze, but the roaring of the wind will always rouse him. The rush of the tempest seems strangely interwoven with moaning and wild cries.

Suddenly a sensation of horror creeps over him. Somewhere outside, from the dark moist depths of the forest a voice is chanting, in a feeble, mournful tone: "At home — at home — home —."

He arose, knocking the but-end of the rifle against the floor in order to be thoroughly awakened. His consciousness returns, and he glances around. The prisoners are resting in a corner of the room; the rambling

glare from the lamp; the sound of the wind: Everything is appearing as it was before.

The light falls across the softly outlined, girlish face of the young prisoner, whose eyes are closed. His head is resting on a wisp of straw. The childish features seem already stiffened in death.

Bartek did not remember having ever suffered such intense heart-ache. A strong feeling of pity and sympathy made his throat swell more strongly than before and started the tears to his eyes.

The old franc-tireur turns toward his comrade.

“Good-night, Wladek.”

Silence. An hour passes, and Bartek becomes more and more oppressed. The wind soars and chants like the organ in the old Pognembin church. Both prisoners are resting quietly. At length the younger one lifts his head and opens his eyes.

“Karl.”

“What is it?”

“Were you asleep?”

“No.”

“It is of no use to deny it: I am terribly afraid. Do whatever you please, but I must pray.”

“Just pray. Don’t mind me.”

“Our Father — — in Heaven, hal-
lowed be thy name,—thy kingdom come
— —.”

His voice was broken by violent sobbing.

“Thy — will — be — done.”

Something cries aloud within Bartek’s breast. In the name of Jesus Christ, what is it?

He can stand it no longer. In another moment he will say: “Lord, here I am.” Then, out through the window and off through the woods! — —.

Measured, regular steps sound and resound in the hall. The patrol is making its round. He is relieved — —.

The following days brought fresh battles, more marches and more activity. Our hero luckily regained his equanimity. All that remained of the feelings awakened during that night was conscientiously drowned in strong beverages. He fought more fiercely than ever. Victory followed his arms.

CHAPTER VI.

Months passed, and spring was in progress. In Pognembin the cherry trees were already beginning to bloom; fresh, green foliage came out everywhere. The winter's grain came up in the fields and began to promise well for the future harvest. Amidst these surroundings Magda was one day sitting outside her hut peeling a poor quality of potatoes for her dinner. The tubers had already started to germinate and seemed better fitted for animal feed than for a working woman's meal. But the new year's crop was not yet ripe, and, besides, there was a great deal of want and misery at Pognembin. Privation and trouble were plainly written on the woman's dark and distressed countenance. For the purpose, possibly, of getting rid of these unpleasant feelings the

woman raised her feeble, strained voice and began to sing an old lay:

Jasin went forth to fight for his land,— oh, yes,
And sometimes he thinks of me,— oh, yes,
For I am his wife, his dear little friend,
—— his sweet little wife, his dearest friend.

The sparrows were merrily chirping in the cherry trees above her. She looked at the dog that stood gasping in the open door; the potato-peeling progressed but slowly, as she would sometimes close her eyes and doze away in the sunshine, sometimes scan the road with a vacant stare. The view of the road extended as far as the railroad station, and the Lord provided that on this occasion she would not be disappointed. Some one was approaching the house from far away, and she tried to distinguish the figure by shading her eyes; but the glare blinded her. The dog became roused, however, lifted his head, barked, and began wagging his tail and running to and fro between the house

and the garden hedge. Finally it jumped the hedge and ran towards a man who came walking towards the gate. Magda looked up, pale and excited.

Might Bartek be there?

There was no doubt of his identity. She sprang to her feet, upsetting the potato-trough, and ran towards the gate. The dog jumped around the wanderer with all signs of boundless joy.

Magda stopped and cried: "Bartek, Bartek."

"Here I am, here I am," answered he, striding forward to meet her.

He opened the gate, rushed into the garden and flung his arms around her.

The woman returned his embrace and began talking hurriedly:

"I sometimes thought you might not at all return home. Oh, dear, I was afraid they had killed you. How did you fare, my dear husband. Come let me look at you. What

rascals, why, they have spoiled your looks. Gracious heaven, he is home again, he is here once more."

She stopped and drew herself back, then looked him full in the face and continued:

"Yes he has returned home. Heaven be praised. Walk in, walk in and rest yourself. Frank is in school. The rascals of Germans trouble the children a great deal; still, the little fellow is doing well. He has got your eyes,—the very same. Well, I'm glad you are home again, for things are getting quite bad. The house is suffering from winds and weather; when it rains the barn-floor becomes soaking wet, and what can we do, for there's a hole in the roof! Bartek, Bartek, to think you are back again. What trouble the harvest has given me, though. Germienicki, our neighbor, helped me a great deal. But how are you doing? Oh, how glad I am! God has preserved you. Walk in, walk in. It almost seems as though you were some one else.

“But what is the matter? Great heavens, what is that?”

She had discovered a scar on his face,—a reddish line extending from the left temple across his right cheek to the beard that covered the lower part of his face.

“Nothing,” declared Bartek. “Some cuirassier tried to pat my cheek; but instead I patted him, you know. They took me to the hospital.”

“Gracious heaven did they!”

“Never mind.”

“Why, you look as thin as death.”

“*Ruhig*,” said Bartek.

He had become thin enough, however; the sun had burned him, and his clothes were mere rags. A true conqueror! His walking was somewhat unsteady.

“What, are you drunk?”

“No, but I’m pretty weak.”

Weak he was, to be sure, and emaciated; but he was drunk, too. The poor man might

have been able to stand, in his present condition, a small quantity of strong drink; at the railroad station he had assimilated, however, a whole pint of brandy. Still, his bearing was that of a conqueror, and his countenance indicated the warmest enthusiasm.

“*Ruhig*,” said he. “The war is ended, and I won the battles. I am the master here, d’ye understand! Look at these,” — he pointed to his stars and medals. “Do you know, now, who I am,— do you know me?”
Rechts, links! Heu, Stroh! Hen,—halt!

The last word was thundered forth with such a force that the woman started and retreated a few steps.

“Are you crazy?”

“What is the matter with you, Magda? Do you know the French language, d’ye? *Musiu, musiu!* — Do you know what that means: Do you know —? I am *musiu*.”

“What in all the world is the matter with you?”

“It does not concern you. *Was ? Done diner*, you know.”

Magda's forehead indicated the approach of a storm.

“What piddle-paddle are you talking there? Did you throw your Polish language overboard? What, you old thief? Did ——? Oh, heaven, what have they done to you?”

“Give me something to eat.”

“Walk in. Off with you.”

Every word of command produced an irresistible expression upon Bartek. On hearing the words: Off with you, he stood bolt upright, with the arms close to the hips, turned halfway around and marched off in the direction of the house. In the doorway he stopped and looked back at Magda with a curious expression in his face.

“Walk in. March !”

He obeyed, but stumbled and fell.

The brandy was beginning to take effect. He commenced singing and glanced around,

trying to discover Franck to whom he said good morning, although the boy was not at all there. Then, bursting into a fit of laughing, he made one long step and two small ones, cried Hoorah, and threw himself on the couch. Towards evening he awoke to find himself sober and rested; afterwards he begged a few Pfennings of Magda, greeted Franck and set out on his triumphal procession to the inn. The rumour of his wonderful deeds had preceded him, as a number of soldiers had told, on their return home, of his bravery in the battles of Gravelotte and Sedan. When it was told that the conqueror had returned and might be seen at the inn, all his former comrades hastened over to bid him welcome.

Bartek is seated at the table, but nobody recognized his former habits and quiet manners in the behaviour of the arrogant, loud-speaking braggart who strikes the table, looks around himself in defiance and chuckles like a turkey.

“Do you recollect, comrades, how I thrashed the Frenchmen, and what Steinmetz said to me?”

“Yes, yes, we remember it all.”

“Everybody tried to make us afraid of the Frenchmen, and yet they were mere cowards,—cowards, I say. *Was?* They devour salad like rabbits, and they run away like rabbits, too. They never drink beer, but wine,—don’t they?”

“Yes, of course, they do.”

“Once, when we set fire to a village they cried: *Pitié, pitié*; I suppose they wanted to have us drink with them and afterwards let them alone. But we did not mind them a bit.” *

“You can understand their language, then?” inquired a young man.

“Of course I can. It is all Greek to you,

*The Slavonic verb *pic* (to drink) enters into the substantive *picie* (pron. pitchie), a drink; the pronounciation of the latter word may be mistaken, by an untrained ear, for that of the French *pitié*, pity.

because you are a fool, but with me it is different. *Done dee pengue, eh !*"

"Then there was Paris, where we fought so many battles. We won every one of them, though, for their armies don't amount to anything. The officers know nothing, and the generals are fools; but ours were splendid."

Old Maciej Kierz, a prosperous farmer in Pognembin, shook his head and said:

"Yes, the Germans have won, and the war was a terrible one. But God alone knows what the result will be to us."

Bartek opened his eyes wide and stared at him.

"Nonsense," said he.

"The German's don't treat us better than they did before. On the contrary, they snub us worse than ever, just as if there were no God above them. They are abusing us more and more, and maltreat us, as they always did."

“That is a lie,” declared Bartek.

Old Kierz possessed so much influence with the population of Pognembin that the entire village might truly be said to think and speak through him. It was considered a dangerous matter to gainsay him; yet Bartek was a conspicuous person and entitled, as such, to a fair measure of authority.

In spite of this his words were unfavorably received,—decidedly so by a great many who looked at him in astonishment and began even to remonstrate with him.

“What? Is Maciej not right? What do you mean by saying he lies?”

“It does not concern me. I have spoken to persons of greater importance than Maciej Comrades, haven’t I talked with Steinmetz? Was? Let Maciej think whatever he may, just wait and see if we wont get a better treatment than before.”

Kierz glanced at the conqueror.

“Idiot,” said he.

Bartek struck the table with such a force that decanters and glasses moved about in a galloppade.

“Quiet there! —— *Bomben und* ——.”

“Nonsense. Go and ask the minister, or His Grace at the castle, and let us hear what they say about it.”

“Did the minister or the Baron ever fight a battle?” returned Bartek. “Never,—but I did. Comrades, don’t believe his words. They are beginning to view us in a different light. Why, we won all the battles for them, of course we did. They’ll give us all I ask of them. If I desire to become a property owner in France, they will do it for me. Oh, yes, the government knows very well who thrashed the Frenchmen. Our regiments fought better than all the rest, say the reports. Poland is better off than ever, if you want to know it.”

Kierz waved his hand in a deprecating manner, arose and left the room abruptly.

Bartek began to win battles, too, in the field of politics. A number of young fellows remaining behind viewed him in wonder and respect.

“All my wishes will be fulfilled, depend upon it. Old Kierz is a fool. When the government asks us to fight, of course we fight. Who would dare to do me any wrong! Look at these.”

He pointed to his medals and emblems.

“For whose sake did I thrash the Frenchmen? For the sake of the Germans? Of course not. Now I am far more important than a German, for no German has got such a number of decorations. Let me have some beer. I am entitled to it, for I have talked with Steinmetz and Podbielsky. Bring me some beer.”

Soon everybody was drinking heavily. Bartek began to sing :

Drink, drink, drink!
Don't let the silver
Rust in your pockets —

Throwing his money on the table he cried:

“There, take what you want. Now I am your lord and master. What a lot of money we got hold of in France. Now it is all gone, together with the houses we ruined, and the people we killed. Yes, we killed a great many, especially franc-tireurs.”

The mood of drunken persons is known to undergo sudden changes. Suddenly Bartek scraped his money together and said:

“God be merciful to me, a sinner.”

Hiding his face in both hands and leaning over the back of his chair he relapsed into silence.”

“What troubles you?” asked some one.

“It could not be my fault,—no, it could not,” murmured Bartek. “But I am sorry for them,—they were countrymen of ours. God be merciful to me! The one was as young and fresh as a rose in bloom; the next day he lay there as white as a sheet. And then they were buried—even before they were cold,—more brandy here!”

“What nonsense he is saying,” remarked one of the company.

“He may be talking with his conscience,” suggested another, more sober individual.

“Fighting makes me thirsty,” murmured Bartek, swallowing a draught and glancing vacantly around the room. After a lengthy pause he brought himself around.

“Have any of you fellows ever talked with Steinmetz? Well, I did, you see. Hoorah! Drink all you want, I’ll pay for it.”

“So, you’ll pay for it, you drunkard,” said Magda’s voice. Only wait, I shall pay it back to you, depend upon it.”

Bartek directed his glassy stare towards the woman, who assumed a threatening attitude.

“Who are you? Did you talk with Steinmetz, perhaps?”

Instead of making any reply Magda turned towards the attentive listeners, saying:

“Friends and neighbors, don’t you pity

my shame and misery? He has returned home, and I was in great hopes of his being a good and sober man. He disappointed me; he returned home as drunk and crazy as a beast. He has forgotten his God as well as the Polish language. After having slept himself sober he sits here, drinking and swearing, spending the money I have earned by honest work. Where did you get that money? Oh, you bad one, you are no more a good Catholic; you are a crazy German who finds his pleasure in getting honest Poles into trouble. You good for nothing, you ——.”

Bursting into tears she raised her voice by an octave, and continued :

“He was a fool, but yet I knew him to be a steady harmless fellow. I have kept longing for him day and night. There is no consolation, no pity anywhere. Gracious Heaven, that you should become such a loafer, such a German.”

The last words were uttered in a plaintive, singing voice. Bartek answered quietly:

“I’ll knock your head off.”

“Do it,— knock me dead at once, kill me, murder me,” cried Magda passionately and stretched her head towards him. “That will be a sight for you,” added she, addressing the listeners.

But the peasants began to slink off. Soon the room was empty except for Magda, who stood in the middle of the room, stretching out her head, and Bartek, her husband.

“Why are you standing there—like a goose, and reaching out with your wind-pipe?” said he.

“Knock it off ——.”

“Of course I won’t,” declared he, arising and staggering forward.

The landlord who was anxious to have the quarrel ended, blew out the only candle yet burning in the room. All became quiet and dark around them.

“Knock it off,” repeated Magda.

“I won’t do it,” declared Bartek triumphantly.

In a little while the moon threw its silvery glare over two persons staggering homewards from the inn. Magda cried and wailed. Behind her, with bent head, humbly came the conqueror from Gravelotte and Sedan.

CHAPTER VII.

Bartek arrived home in such a state of exhaustion that he was unable to commence working for the support of his family. This caused great distress in the household which needed, more than ever, the strong hands of a man for its support. Magda arranged matters, however, as well as possible and worked every day without exception faithfully assisted by the Czermienicki family. The small earnings were insufficient, however, for the support of the little household, and by degrees the family went to the bad. The Slowik's had contracted certain debts with a Herr Just, a German colonist who possessed a tract of excellent land near Pognembin and owned, besides, large sums of money which he had loaned to the farmers at an appalling rate of interest. In the first place

he assisted the Baron Jarzynsky with divers amounts of money. The Baron's name figured in the Golden Book,* and for this reason it became a matter of necessity to maintain the standard of elegance and splendour. But Herr Just was by no means unwilling to lend money to the peasants as well. For nearly six months Magda had owed him the sum of twenty dollars, part of which she had forwarded to Bartek during the war while the remainder was used for household purposes. The amount was a small one, however, and no doubt God would grant them a good harvest. If the farm was properly managed she would not need having any fear. But Bartek remained perfectly inactive; the work did not agree with him, and he felt weak. Magda, being sceptical on this point, undertook to inquire of the priest what might be done in order to induce Bartek to work, but the preacher merely shook

* The official enumeration of Polish houses of nobility.

his head. The ex-soldier suffered from shortness of breath and complained of pains in the back as soon as he attempted working in the fields. He remained inactive, day by day, and seemed contented with sitting in the open air, smoking a large clay-pipe, the bowl of which was decorated with a likeness of Bismarck dressed in a white uniform and a cuirassier helmet. His drowsy, worn-out expression seemed to suggest that he was yet suffering the effects of the previous winter's hardship. However that might be, Bartek remained for days and weeks in his comfortable seat, thinking of the war, pondering over his own bravery, reflecting upon Magda, meditating,—doing nothing.

One day he was roused by the weeping of Franck, his son, who had returned from school in a state of great agitation.

Bartek ceases puffing and addressed the boy.

“Well, Franck, what ails you?”

“Ails me?” said Franck with a great sobbing.

“What makes you howl so?”

“Shouldn’t I howl when I’ve got a thrashing?”

“Who thrashed you?”

“Herr Boege, of course.”

Herr Boege occupied the position of a teacher of the public school in Pognembin.

“How dared he do it!” reflected Bartek.

“I suppose he would not ask any one’s permission,” returned the boy.

Magda who had been digging the garden, climbed the fence and meddled in the conversation between father and son.

“Did you make any mischief?” inquired she.

“Not a bit. Boys called me names and said I was a Polish pig. The Germans had fought the Frenchmen; now they were to make a kick at us. Mischief—no, I did not make the least little bit of it, for he asked

me who was the greatest man on earth, and when I said it was the Holy Father in Rome he thrashed me, and when I cried he said I was a Polish pig; as they had now fought the Frenchmen they were going to make a kick ——.” The boy continued stating the details of the intercourse, according to the old prescription: He said,— and I said,— and he said ——. Magda hid her face in her apron, turned towards Bartek and cried:

“There you hear, just listen to that. Just go and fight the Frenchmen, and let the Germans thrash your child like a dog, and call him all kinds of names. Just go and fight for the Germans. There is your reward,— you blockhead. you ——.”

Here Magda, seconded by Franck, commenced weeping over her own speech, while Bartek opened his eyes wide and remained for a considerable length of time too bewildered to say anything, much less to consider what was going on before him. How could

it be? Was this the outcome of his bravery?

Having remained immovable in his seat a long while he finally decided to commence action at once. With shining eyes and the blood mounting to his face he jumped from his chair.

In elementary natures astonishment and horror often turn into a feeling of rage.

“I’ll go and see him.”

Away he went,—not very far, as the school was located in the neighborhood, close to the church. He found the teacher in the hall, feeding a number of small pigs with bread crumbs.

Herr Boege was a tall man, nearly fifty years of age, dignified and robust like an oak. His figure was rather slim, only his cheeks appeared somewhat chubby and enclosed a pair of large, clear eyes expressive of courage and energy.

Bortek stepped forward close to him.

“Why do you strike my child, German,—*was ?*” said he.

Boege retreated a few steps, surveyed him without evincing the slightest fear, and replied phlegmatically

“Out with you, you Polish beast.”

“Why did you strike my child ?” repeated Bartek.

“Do you want me to give you the same treatment, you Slavonic idiot? Upon my word, I shall make you understand who is master here. Confound you, if you don’t seek the courts with your complaints. March.”

Bartek seized the teacher by his arm, shook him violently and cried hoarsely:

“Do you know me? Do you know who thrashed the Frenchmen, and who talked with Steinmetz? Why do you strike my boy, you Suabian mule?”

Boege’s eyes which projected almost as far as Bartek’s own organs and vision, seemed almost to start from their sockets.

Being in possession of considerable strength he determined to rid himself of his adversary by a single stroke.

The conqueror from Gravelotte and Sedan received a terrible blow in his face. The effect of it was that the peasant at once lost his senses. In him awoke the fearful conqueror of the Turcos and the Zouaves. In vain Oscar, Boege's son, attempted to defend his father; he was knocked senseless while the school-master felt himself lifted from the ground. Bartek raised him on his arms and threw him out into some direction,—he did not know where. Unhappily Boege's wife had placed outside the house a large tub of swill for the hogs. A great splash was heard, and a few seconds afterwards Boege's legs were seen sprawling about the edge of the tub, where he had, in fact, landed.

“Help, help.”

Frau Boege who had witnessed the affair,

hastened to the assistance of her husband and upset the tub, whereupon Boege struggled to his feet and disappeared within the house.

From the neighboring farms several colonists ran to the assistance of the unfortunate schoolmaster. Several of the men rushed forward to attack Bartek with sticks and other primitive weapons. In the general skirmish that followed it was difficult to distinguish friend from foe, as a large number of sprawling bodies appeared to become entangled in one another.

Suddenly Bartek disengaged himself and bounded towards a willow hedge which separated the yard from the fields. He was closely followed by the Germans, who were yelling furiously, but suddenly stopped and prepared, on seeing Bartek advancing, flourishing against them a heavy willow branch, for a hasty retreat.

Bartek advanced, and the Germans at

once took to their heels eagerly pursued by the conqueror.

They all luckily escaped. Bartek's anger was considerably cooled, and he, himself thought of repairing to his house. He paused a short while to think how glorious the retreat would have been, if he had found himself face to face with Frenchmen; history would have made such an encounter immortal.

The retreat of the German colonists did not, however, close the engagement. Bartek's pursuers, numbering nearly twenty armed men, advanced a second time, slowly but surely. Our hero retreated before them, not unlike a hog-steer pressed by dogs. Once in a while he would stop and face the enemy, but the latter attempted no attack. Although the willow-branch held-them in due respect they commenced throwing stones at the warrior, and one of these missiles struck him in the forehead, producing an ugly gash from

which the blood streamed down his face. He felt weaker and weaker, and finally stumbled, dropped his weapon, and fell.

“Hoorah!” shouted the colonists.

Before they reached the spot Bartek, however, struggled to his feet. This held them in check, as they had often witnessed the ferocity of a wounded wolf. The warrior might yet be quite dangerous. Besides, the Polish district was not far away, and from some of the houses there appeared a number of young men who seemed inclined to join the Slavonic forces.

So the colonists retired from the campaign to their farms. Bartek remained in possession of the field.

“What has happened?” inquired his friends.

“I’ve thrashed the German’s,” declared Bartek, panting from exhaustion. He staggered forward, but stumbled and fell into a heavy swoon.

CHAPTER VIII.

Matters began to take a serious turn. The German papers had started divers series of articles treating of the malicious persecutions organized by a barbarous, ignorant population against the peaceful German colonists. It had been stated, also, that anarchistic agitation and religious fanaticism were highly instrumental in bringing about such a condition of affairs. Boege had become the hero of the day. He, a quiet, gentle schoolmaster, who strove for the dissemination of knowledge in a remote border-land, — he, a true missionary of civilization among barbarians, had become a victim of a rebellion. Happy was he, however, that he might count on the loyal support of a hundred million Germans who were ready to defend, etc.

Bartek received no warning of the im-

pending storm. He preserved his wonted equanimity, always hoping to be acquitted. It was a matter of record that Boege had struck his child without provocation; afterwards he, himself, had been attacked from behind. No doubt he had a right to defend himself. Some one had thrown a stone at him,—at whom? At a soldier who had received countless compliments on account of brave conduct; who had won the battle of Gravelotte, who had conversed with Steinmetz, and distinguished himself in many other ways. He never was able to comprehend why the Germans appeared ignorant of his high standing, or how they dared abuse him in such ways as they did; likewise, how Boege could entertain the idea that the Germans intended to make a kick at the Pognembinians, since the honourable records of the latter during the war had become matters of history. Still, as far as he, himself, was concerned, no doubt the court as well as the

government would stand on his side. Official circles were bound, at any rate, to recognize his important services. Then, even if they all were against him, Steinmetz must recognise his just claims of recognition. As Bartek had suffered, in a personal way, heavy losses and as he had run deeply into debts, justice could not be denied him.

A body of armed police officers arrived in Pognembin with orders to arrest Bartek. As they expected to be met with a fair measure of resistance, they had been equipped with a fair-sized arsenal of fire arms. Their anticipation was not, however, fulfilled; Bartek attempted no resistance, when they ordered him to enter a carriage. Magda was disconsolate, as might well be expected, and repeated over and over again:

“Poor dear, why should you ever leave home and fight the Frenchmen !”

“Be quiet you fool,” said Bartek.

During the journey he greeted his friends

and acquaintances with a glad smile. To some of them he cried: "I'll show them who has been wronged."

He appeared in the court-room as triumphant and dignified as circumstances would permit, displaying all his medals.

The court proved indeed lenient to him, admitting the existence of certain extenuating circumstances. But in spite of the latter Bartek was sentenced to ninety days imprisonment, and besides, the court imposed upon him a fine of a hundred and fifty Mark damages due to Herr Boege and other colonists for bodily molestation.

The *Posener Zeitung* mentioned the case in the following manner: "When the sentence was announced the prisoner, instead of showing any remorse, poured forth such a volley of rude language, impudently upbraiding the government with his alleged merits that the officiating judge would have been fully justified in holding him respon-

sible for his insults upon the court as well as upon the German nation."

In the meantime Bartek spent his time in jail reviewing to himself his matchless deeds at Gravelotte, Sedan and Paris.

It would be a great injustice, however, to maintain that the conduct of Herr Boege met with any protest on the part of the public. On a rainy forenoon one of the Polish representatives proved to the legislative assembly that the attitude of the government towards the population of Poland had been greatly changed; no doubt the population in question had derived, on account of its bravery and its readiness to self-sacrifice, a greater respect of its rights. He also alluded to the fact that Herr Boege had transgressed his authority by abusing Polish children; by applying to them the worst kinds of appellatives, and by asserting that henceforth the German population would make a kick at the old inhabitants of the Polish provinces.

During this speech the rain was falling heavily, and as rainy weather is apt to produce sleepiness, so the conservative party was constantly yawning, likewise the liberals, and, by contamination, even the socialists.

When at length this "Polish interpellation" came up for discussion, the assembly proceeded to business.

Bartek spent his time in prison, or rather in the prison hospital to which he had been removed when one of his wounds burst open and required treatment. As he was not troubled by fever he plunged into a sea of empty speculation. During his lucida intervalla he often arrived at the result that possibly he might have fought the Frenchmen without sufficient reason.

In the meantime, Magda became more and more distressed. The fine must be paid, and the woman was left entirely without resources. The preacher had promised to lend some

assistance, but it was found that the total of available funds would scarcely exceed forty Marks. The congregation was poor, and, besides, the reverend gentlemen never remembered how his money was spent. The Baron Jarzynski had gone abroad; it was rumoured that the object of his journey was to win the affections of some wealthy lady in the Kingdom. So Magda was almost at ^{er} his wit's end.

A prolongation of the term of payment could not be obtained. She had determined to delay selling the house, or the cow, as long as possible. The summer was coming on,—the very worst time of the year. Her provisions had given out; the household required money, and soon the harvest would require attention. She became utterly desperate, beseeching the authorities to treat her leniently; but no reply was forthcoming, although she had set forth an account of her husband's merits, as best she knew. The

day set for the payment of the fine drew alarmingly near, and yet her prospects were as disheartening as before.

She prayed to God for help and relief, mindful of the times when they had ample means, and Bartek was working at the factory. The neighbors to whom she applied for help, possessed no ready money, as the war had exhausted their means. Herr Just was not to be thought of, as she was already owing him a small amount, the interest of which had not even been paid yet. Still, the gentlemen just mentioned appeared on the scene quite unexpectedly.

“'Morning.”

“Good morning, Herr Just. How do you do?”

“How about my money?”

“Oh, my dear Herr Just, what do you expect of a woman in my position? They have put my husband in prison, and I am required to pay his fine. I don't know what

to do, in fact, I'd lie down and die rather than suffering such agony day by day. I expect you to wait a while, dear Herr Just."

She burst into tears and bent forward to kiss the plump, red hand of the German.

"When His Grace at the castle returns home I intend to ask him for assistance, and then you will receive your money."

"Then, how do you expect to pay the fine?"

"I don't know. Probably I shall be forced to sell the cow."

"In that case I am ready to advance the necessary amount."

"God bless you, dear Herr Just. Although a Lutheran you are a kind and benevolent man. If all Germans were like you, we should have no cause for complaint."

"But I do not loan money without interest."

"Certainly not. Oh, no!"

"Then you may as well sign these papers."

“To be sure I will.”

“Call at my office and have the matter settled.”

He returned to the village, while Magda repaired to the preacher soliciting his advice. What could she do but accept the offer! The preacher considered the time too short and the interest too large; he regretted the absence of the Baron who would no doubt have declared himself ready to assist her. Under the circumstances nothing was to be done, however, except making use of the opportunity. The total of his indebtedness amounted to three hundred Mark, twice the sum of the fine. When the latter was paid she would be in possession of a few Marks for daily expenses.

Bartek whose consent was necessary to make the papers binding promptly affixed his signature, on which occasion Magda visited him in his cell. The hero was considerably downcast, dispirited; he had not yet

recovered from his sickness. He intended to lodge a complaint of the great wrong that he had suffered. His oral appeal to the court had not even been received. On the whole, the notice in the *Posener Zeitung* had prejudiced the authorities against him, and it was generally conceded that the peaceful German population had a right to be guarded against all attempts of encroachments upon their rights, especially since it had given abundant proof, during the war and on other occasions, of its patriotism and devotion. Hence, there was ample occasion for rejecting Bartek's complaints, and no wonder that the ex-soldier appeared down-cast.

"I suppose we are going to the dogs," said he to his wife.

"Dear me, I'm afraid we are," returned Magda.

Bartek pondered.

"I have suffered a great wrong," said he.

“Boege is persecuting the boy,” continued the woman. “I called at his house and asked him leave the child alone, but he merely abused me. Oh, the Germans are gaining headway in Pognembin; they are afraid of nobody.”

“Yes, they are forming a very strong party,” assented Bartek in a tone of despondency.

“I am only a plain woman, yet I say God is stronger.”

“We must take refuge with him,” said the prisoner.

After a short pause he resumed:

“What of Just?”

“If God almighty would grant us a good harvest probably we might raise the money. Probably His Grace at the castle will assist us, although he is, himself, troubled with debts. I wish he would marry the lady abroad.”

“Will he return soon?”

“No one knows. Some say he will soon return home with his young wife. But the Germans may demand all he has. Oh, those Germans, they push themselves forward everywhere, like vermin, both in the village and among the farmers. Surely, that must be a visitation for our sins, and I don’t see how we shall ever be released.”

“You are a sensible woman. I hope you will manage the affair some way or other.”

“How could I? Did I not accept Just’s offer in spite of myself? According to law the hut and the land is his property, still he is better than most Germans, even if he minds his own profit before thinking of any one else. Nobody ever knew him to be lenient, so there is no hope whatever for us, from that source. I am not blind, of course, to the reason why he offered such a large increase of the loan, but there was nothing to do but accept. Why can’t you advise me, as you consider yourself better than all

others. You've fought the Frenchmen, now you'd better try to find a roof and a bite for us.

The hero from Gravelotte looked perplexed.

"Oh, Jesus,—Jesus!"

His sorrowful expression softened her.

"Poor boy, don't let me give you too much trouble. I forgot your wound is not yet healed. I hope God will grant us a good year; thus far the rye has been growing so well that sometimes I think of bending down to kiss the soil. The wheat, too, is in good shape. So the soil, at least, is faithful; it never wrongs any one. After all, in spite of all the war and of all other things, the crop promises well ——."

And Magda smiled through her tears.

"The soil isn't German," said she.

"Magda," cried Bartek, staring at her, and with a new light in her eyes, "Magda ——!"

“Wnat is it?”

“Oh, you are ——, you are ——.”

She had comforted him without realizing it, and he felt as grateful to her as a child, but without being able to give expression to this feeling.

CHAPTER IX.

In certain respects Magda was superior to most of her kind; she chided Bartek, and yet her devotion to him was perfectly sincere. On certain occasions she might call him foolish and thoughtless, yet it troubled her sorely when others agreed with her on this point. "My Bartek," said she, "will sometimes appear a great fool, yet he is really a sly fellow." Really Bartek possessed about as much slyness as an average horse, and in the absence of Magda would never have managed affairs at home. At present the welfare of the family was dependent all together upon her, and as she had once begun trudging around and arranging matters Bartek was at liberty to take his ease. One day she returned home from one of her numerous

expeditions and entering Bartek's cell hurriedly exclaimed:

"Bartek, old man, listen to what I've got to tell you. The Baron has returned home, and, indeed, the girl accepted him. She looks as soft and red as a berry, besides, she brought him piles and piles of money."

The intelligence was correct in every particular, Jarzynsky having succeeded in uniting his fate with that of a young lady endowed with considerable wealth.

"Well, and then?" returned Bartek.

"Keep still and don't behave like a fool," returned Magda. I got nearly out of breath. Well, you know, I stepped forward to greet Her Grace, and there — there she came — towards me — like a queen, like a flower, oh, so beautiful! How hot it is here; — no, stop and let me tell you all about her."

She flung away her shawl and wiped her face as eagerly as she was talking.

"Her gown was as shining as one of the

blue field flowers, and I wanted to kiss her feet, but instead she reached out both of her small, white hands,—oh, such fine hands, as small as those of a baby. She looks exactly as a saint, and, then, her heart is pure and kind, and she promised not to forget the poor ones. I spoke to her and begged her remember us; then she replied: “I shall do all that I can to assist you.” What a fine voice she has! When she speaks one is almost ready to go down on her knees before her. Well, and then I told her how much misery there is in Pognembin. I could not help crying,, and she cried too, poor dear, until His Grace came over and began kissing and caressing her. Men are so funny, you know. But she says to him: “Do all you can for this woman.” “All you want,” says he. Heaven bless the dear lady for her kindness, she is so sweet. His Grace said to me: “You have done a great wrong in meddling with the Germans; still, I am willing to pay your debt by Just.”

Bartek scratched his head.

“But haven’t the Germans caught pretty well hold of the Baron, himself?” inquired he.

“What? The Lady is wealthy; she may be able to buy all the Germans in Pognembin. The election is drawing near, and the Baron said you should not give your vote to the Germans, then he would be willing to pay our debts and teach Boege a lesson. He inquired about your health and said he would talk with the doctor; then you would receive a certificate of poor health and be allowed to return home. If you were not pardoned you might serve the remainder of your sentence next winter, but as the harvest draws near you must return home as soon as possible,—do you understand it all! To-day the doctor will be invited to Pognembin; he has received an invitation from the Baron. So next winter you will return to this snug and warm place where you get

your meals gratis, but in a few day you must go back and attend to your work. Just will receive his money, you know, and next fall we shall have money enough to return the money to the Baron who will ask no interest of us. And if we cannot pay it all I'll go and talk to Her Grace, and ask her to speak a word in our favor,—she is a perfect angel, you know. Well, what do you say?"

"She must be an excellent lady," declared Bartek with great energy.

"You must drop on you knees before her,—if you don't I'll knock your brains out. Oh, I hope God will give us a good harvest."

"Now you've found out, I suppose, who are our true friends, and who are ready to lend us a hand. Were they Germans, perhaps? Did ever Germans give you anything except those silly medals? They have abused you in all possible ways. I say, you'd better drop on your knees before her."

"I'll do it," resolutely promised Bartek.

Fate appeared to be again favouring the conqueror. A few days after Magda's last visit he was notified that the authorities had decided, on account of his poor health, to release him for a time. Before returning home he was to appear before the justice, which he did, trembling with fear. This farmer who had gained one victory after another and conquered standards and cannon, really found himself quaking before a uniform; he was seized with an indefinite feeling of horror at the idea of being an object of pursuit, and the fact that his enemies were in absolute command of his life and destiny added to his misery. Some terrible power stood ready to crush him as soon as he would undertake to liberate himself. There he stood before the justice, as he had appeared, under quite different circumstances, before Steinmetz, straight as a rush and almost afraid of breathing. Some officers were present, completing the martial appearance of the

episode. The ex-soldier was sternly scanned from head to foot through sparkling eyeglasses in gold frames and presented a true picture of such internal and external wretchedness as a Prussian officer regards with profound contempt. He held his breath while the justice addressed him in a tone of supreme authority. The judge of Bartek's fate neither begged nor persuaded, but commanded and threatened the prisoner. One of the representatives of the electoral district had died, and his place was to be filled by a new election.

“Polish idiot,—beware of voting in favor of Jarzynsky, beware of it.”

The eyebrows of the officers were contracted in a threatening and demonstrative manner. One chewed the end of his cigar, repeating the words of the justice: “Beware of it.” Bartek's breath had almost stopped. When at length the long expected word “March ” struck his ears, he turned around

and soon found his breath in the open air. The order he had received weighed but lightly upon him; he was happy at the prospect of returning to Pognembin and reaping his rye and wheat. Around him lay the open land with its yellow corn-fields and the many millions of heavy ears that swayed before the wind and touched one another with a faint rush — the sound a farmer never forgets. Bartek was yet somewhat weak, but the sun warmed him through and through. What a beautiful land, what a splendid world! And he was near his home.

CHAPTER X.

Election! Election. The Lady Jarzynsky has heard so much of it that she can think, talk and dream of nothing else.

“Mylady is a great politician,” says one of the neighbors, a szlachcic, or squire, kissing her hand, smacking like a dragon, while she, the great politician, is blushing deeply and replies, with a graceful smile:

“Oh, well, we are keeping up the agitation as well as possible.”

“No doubt Pan,* Joseph will be elected,” announces the szlachcic in a tone of profound conviction. She replies:

“I certainly hope he will, not only for his own sake, but also—here the treacherous blush again covers the face of “the great poli-

* Sir.

tician''—for the sake of the common welfare — —."

"A veritable Bismarck, upon my word —," cries the szlachcic, again touching her fine, white hands with his lips. And then they discuss the campaign.

The szlachcic is ready to manage the affair in Lower Krzywda and Mizerow. Upper Krzywda is already in the hands of Schulberg, the enemy. The Lady Marie will take upon herself the town of Pognembin.

The new role is absorbing her attention almost to the extent of making her head burn. Day by day she moves about the highroad visiting lowly huts. One hand lifts up the skirts, the other is holding a parasol, and beneath it all her small feet are tripping eagerly to and fro among the many important political questions. She enters the huts, or greets the farmers in their fields with a mild "God's peace." She attends the sick and ministers to the afflicted in all possible

ways. Of course she would do so even if politics did not exist, for her heart is as good as gold. Still, politics are spurning her, it cannot be doubted. What would she not do for the sake of promoting the cause she is serving? Her desire of attending the political meetings is great, but she is afraid of telling her husband,—and yet she has dared meditating on the speech she would deliver on such an occasion, if she were called upon to do it. What a superb speech. Of course she would not dare to make this speech, and yet, if she did it certainly could not fail to make a profound and lasting impression upon the audience. When it was ruminated that the authorities had dissolved these meetings, “the great politician went back to her room and burst into tears from sheer anger, tore one of her handkerchiefs to pieces and appeared with red eyes when the paroxysm was over. Her husband implored her not to fret about the matter, but in vain. The next

day she set about her duties even more eagerly than ever, and the Lady Marie was baffled by nothing on earth. She entered a number of German houses and scolded the Germans in such a way that the Baron was obliged to restrain her. Still, there was no danger of her working any harm anywhere. Everybody received her kindly, kissed her hands and smiled upon her as they would smile upon a rosebud. Wherever she pays her visits she leaves behind her a feeling of life and gladness.

In due course she arrives at Bartek's house, but the dog is refusing her admittance. Magda remonstrates with the dog by throwing a piece of wood at him.

"Mylady! cries Magda, hastening forward to kiss the small, white hand that is resting on the handle of the gate.

Bartek throws himself on the ground before her Ladyship, according to his resolution, and little Franck kisses the fairy hand,

sucks on his fingers and retires to a corner, where he remains lost in admiration.

“I hope,” says the lady, “I certainly hope, my dear Bartek, that you will give your vote to the Baron and not waste it on the man Schulberg.”

“Why, certainly,” cries Magda. “Nobody will mind Schulberg the least, nobody will vote for him. The deuce take him,—I beg your Ladyship’s pardon, but when Germans are mentioned I cannot tame my tongue.”

“My husband has been talking of adjusting the affair between yourselves and Just.”

“God bless you!” says Magda, and turning to Bartek, continues: “Why don’t you say anything, you blockhead? I hope your Ladyship will pardon his behaviour, but he never says much.”

“Well,” resumes her Ladyship, “I hope you will not fail to vote in favor of the Baron. You are a Polander, and we all are

obliged to support one another, are we not?

"I'll knock him dead if he gives his vote to any other candidate," asserted Magda.

"Why don't you tell her Ladyship that you are ready to support our own party. Well, he never says much, anyhow. Don't sit down in her Ladyship's presence,—get out of that chair."

Bartek obeys and kisses the white hand, but his thoughts are sad, and he cannot express them. His mind is occupied with the stern command of the justice, through which he has been confronted with the problem of serving two masters.

Election day has arrived, and Pan Jarzynsky is confident of being elected. From neighboring towns and villages visitors arrive in great numbers and are cordially received. The gentlemen have already visited the election tables, whereupon they remain at the castle awaiting the results which will

be announced by the preacher at the earliest opportunity. A great dinner party will be held, and towards evening Mylord and Mylady will board the train for Poznan, where they intend to stay a short while before going to Berlin.

Some of the villages have completed their voting on the evening before, and results are satisfactory so far. In a few hours the final results will be communicated, and the party at the castle is hopeful.

Her Ladyship is a trifle nervous, yet she moves about the rooms with a kind word and a smile for every one. As a hostess she is perfect in every way, and the guests whisper to one another that Pan Jarzynsky has won a perfect treasure in the Kingdom. The said treasure cannot maintain her dignity, however, but passes from one group to another for the purpose of being assured that Joseph "will certainly be elected." Though not over-ambitious, and even though she

has no special desire of becoming the wife of a member of the legislative assembly, she has taken into her youthful head the idea that her husband is really bound to fulfil a mission among his kind,—a mission in which she, herself, has a part. Whenever she chances to look at him both smile as happily as children. Every few seconds somebody opens the window to see if the preacher has arrived.

The matter is, in fact, of considerable importance, as the deceased member was a Pole, and this is the first occasion on which the Germans have chosen a candidate of their own race. Evidently the late war has inspired them with courage, but on this very account the Polish party is anxious about the election of its own candidate. Although dinner has not yet been served patriotic exclamations are not wanting; they make a deep impression upon her Ladyship who is not accustomed to them. From time to time

she is seized with an attack of fear. Suppose some one willfully made a mistake in counting the votes! No, it could not be, as the committee was not composed of Germans alone. Some elderly gentlemen take upon themselves to explain how the counting of votes is made, and she is listening attentively although it has been explained in her presence at least a hundred times. The important question is whether or not the Polish element will be represented in the *Reichstag* by a friend or by an enemy.

In a short while the problem is solved. A cloud of dust is passing along the road toward the castle.

“The preacher is there, the priest is coming!”

Excitement is plainly written on all faces, and her Ladyship turns pale. Every one is sure of victory, yet the decision makes the party feel particularly uneasy. The dust cloud was found to contain, however, the

village magistrate, who arrives on horse-back, descends and ties his steed by a post near the gate, whereupon he is hastening towards the building. A number of guests headed by the hostess rush forward to meet him.

“Do you know anything! Who is elected? What do you know about the election? When will the results be made known?”

Questions are flying to and fro. The peasant throws his cap into the air and roars out:

“His Lordship has been elected.”

The Baroness throws herself on a bench and presses both hands against her bosom.

One servant after another comes running forward, crying: “Hoorah! Germans have been defeated. Long live the Baron and the Baroness!”

The new member of the *Reichstag* orders dinner to be served at once.

Some one inquires about the priest.

“He will arrive in a few minutes,” says the bailiff, “the last votes are being counted.”

The party returns to the *salon*, where congratulations are exchanged on a large scale. The Baroness is unable to conceal her joy; she throws herself around her husband’s neck regardless of the company. Enthusiasm becomes general.

“We are yet of some consequence, are we not?” observes one of the guests from Mizerow.

A rattling of wheels is heard outside, whereupon the priest enters with old Maciej.

“Welcome,—welcome!” cries everybody.
“What was our majority?”

The priest remains quiet one brief moment, then draws himself up and hurls against the enthusiastic assembly the following three words:

“Schulberg is elected.”

After a short pause of terror and aston-

ishment a shower of questions strike the speaker, who merely repeats the appalling message:

“Schulberg is elected.”

“What! How so? The bailiff said he was defeated.—What is the matter?—What has happened?”

Pan Jarzynsky leads his young wife into another room. She is struck almost to the extent of fainting.

“How terrible,” says everybody, while cries of joy and exultation are heard from the village. The Germans are proud of their victory.

The Baron and the Baroness return to the room after a brief absence. In the door he turns around and addresses her in a low whisper: “*Il faut faire bonne mine.*” And her Ladyship does not weep; her eyes are dry, but considerably red and swollen.

“How did it happen?” quietly asks Jarzynsky.

"It must happen, Mylord," explains the minister, "when the farmers—even those of Pognembin—vote in favor of Schulberg."

"Who did that?"

"Many of us noticed that Bartek Slowik voted in favor of the Germans."

"Bartek Slowik?" cries the Baroness.

"Certainly. Somebody is scolding him now, and the fellow crawls in the dust before his wife, who threatens to kill him.—I was, myself, present when he stepped forward to vote."

"Such fellows deserve to be expelled from the village," suggests the visitor from Mizerow.

"Mylady," says Maciej, "a great many of those who served in the army voted as Slowik did, and they maintain they are acting under strict orders."

A great many of those present spoke of pressure on electors, swindling, fraud, and the like.

Dinner was served amidst a gloomy silence, and towards evening Jarzynsky and his wife departed for Dresden—not Berlin.

In his hut Bartek, damned, despised and scorned by everybody, was spending the remainder of this unhappy day, a stranger to every one, even to his wife who refused to speak to him.

Towards fall God granted the inhabitants of Pognembin a rich harvest, and Herr Just, who had come into possession of Bartek's estate prided himself on having made a good investment.

One day three persons left Pognembin: A peasant with his wife and child. The man stooped considerably and bore the appearance of an old miner, or stonecutter. They were obliged to leave the village, as nobody cared to employ their service.

The weather was cold and rainy. Magda wept bitterly over the loss of her house and

home. Bartek never spoke. Aside from a cruxifix at the roadside no human figure was visible anywhere. The rain fell more and more heavily, and darkness settled upon the whole land.

Bartek, Magda and Franck are leaving Pognembin for the neighboring town, where the conqueror from Gravelotte, Sedan and Paris will spend a month in prison on account of his assault on Boege.

The Baron Jarzynsky and Mylady are yet staying in Dresden.

THE END.

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